

J A RANCH HEADQUARTERS
Paloduro
Armstrong County
Texas

HABS TX-3530
TX-3530

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

J A RANCH HEADQUARTERS

HABS No. TX 3530

Location: The headquarters of the JA Ranch are located in southeastern Armstrong County, Texas, approximately 25 miles southwest of Clarendon, Texas. The ranch itself extends into Armstrong, Briscoe, and Donley Counties.

The ranch headquarters is composed of the main house, bunkhouse, stables, and corrals, office, garage, two employee houses, and water tanks. The structures stand immediately below the breaks of the Palo Duro Canyon, north of Mitchell Peak and west of Mulberry Flats.

USGS Plainview Quadrangle, UTM coordinates:

A 14.300160.3854800

B 14.300000.3854400

C 14.299570.3854640

D 14.299750.3855000

Present Owner: Cornelia (Ninia) Wadsworth Ritchie Bivins, who is the great-granddaughter of Cornelia Wadsworth Ritchie Adair

Present Use: The JA Ranch Headquarters serve as both a domestic residence and working ranch. Cattle and horses are kept in pastures adjoining the headquarters. Hands employed by the ranch conduct their work from the headquarters.

Significance: The JA Ranch is the oldest, continuously operated ranch in the Texas Panhandle.¹ From its founding in 1876 by Charles Goodnight (1836-1929), the ranch has experienced periods of great expansion and subsequent periods of downsizing. During the late nineteenth century when British investment in American ranches peaked, the JA was one of the most notable examples of European capital investment melding with American frontier knowledge. The JA's founding and growth occurred

¹ Pauline Durett Robertson and R.L. Robertson. *Cowman's Country: Fifty Frontier Ranches in the Texas Panhandle, 1876-1887*. Amarillo, Texas: Paramount Publishing Company, 1981, pp. 75-77. Although JA is considered the oldest ranch in the Panhandle, it is actually the oldest, continuously operated ranch in the region. In 1875, A.G. Springer established the Springer Ranch in Hemphill County. Springer was killed in 1878, and the subsequent owners of the ranch sold off the property by 1889. Other ranches were established in the mid-1870s and early 1880s, including the Quarter Circle T, the RO, the Quarter Circle Heart, and T Anchor, the Frying Pan, and the XIT.

during the open range era, adapted to the closed range era, and finally emerged into the modern era of the cattle industry. Furthermore, the sustained existence of the ranch is remarkable considering the environmental harshness of the Palo Duro country as annual precipitation rates are low, average annual temperatures are extreme, and available grazing lands are sparse.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection:

1878 to circa 1890-1895. The headquarters were gradually built from 1878 through the early 1890s and alterations and additions were executed as late as circa 1912-1916.

2. Architect:

Charles Goodnight and unknown. Goodnight assisted with the construction of many of the structures at the headquarters, but the architect responsible for the main house is unknown.

3. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses:

In 1879, Goodnight relocated the ranch headquarters from southwest present-day Armstrong County near the south bank of the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River to a site below the Palo Suro Canyon breaks in southeast present-day Armstrong County between Lone Tree Creek and Battle Creek. From 1878 to 1885, Goodnight built the majority of the structures at the headquarters. The first structure raised at the headquarters was a two-story log cabin, built by Goodnight and George Osborne in October through December 1878. Osborne felled the cedar logs from nearby Mulberry Creek, and Goodnight notched the corners and chinked the spaces between the logs.²

Additional structures were built to accommodate the needs of the ranch. By 1885, Goodnight has established a functional and efficient headquarters for the extensive land holdings grazed by his cattle. Late in that year, an "explorer" employed by the *Galveston News* visited the JA Ranch and wrote of Goodnight and the status of the ranch in an article that appeared in the newspaper's January 10, 1886 edition:

"It is a century ahead of the free-grass longhorn ranch of the past few years. It was constructed by a bold pioneer and a man of native genius and miraculous energy and industry. He has had to be a ranger captain, his home for years a fort and his cowboys his soldiers; he has made his rails, built his houses, working as a laborer and carpenter; he has excavated his dugouts at his stations in early days; he has engineered his road making along the gorges and mountain sides and handled the pick and spade; Winchester belted to his back he has built dams and made his tanks, shod his horses, and mended his

² J. Evetts Haley. *Charles Goodnight: Cowman and Plainsman*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, pp. 313-314.

wagons, imported from abroad his fine bulls, made great land trades and little ones, parleyed with the Indians, and stood off the rustlers...

"He has built...nearly fifty houses, large and small, hundreds of miles of roads, twenty or thirty large water tanks, and as many large corrals. The ranch has hundreds of miles of wire fence, has a fine hay farm, inclosures [*sic*] separate for beeves, for bulls, for horses, for poor cows to be fed, for calves weaned...

"The improvements at the main headquarters of the Palo Duro ranch are better than those of most of the other Panhandle ranches...The main house is a commodious two-story wooden structure of large logs and planks...Water for domestic purposes is brought down through iron pipes from a large spring at the foot of the brakes [*sic*], which rise into the broad Llano Estacado 1000 yards above this abode...

"The mess-house is a large and very substantial structure...Near this house is a dairy, where butter is made and stored during the summer in sufficient quantities to last headquarters during the entire year...A short distance from this house is the poultry yard and house where the largest and finest breeds of fowls are kept. They supply eggs by the gross for the residents of this village, and the cook who takes care of them says that at least 1000 chickens a year are appropriated for table use. Across the street is the large blacksmith shop, where wagons are mended and horses shod...Adjoining this structure is the tin shop, where all the tinware used on the ranch...is manufactured from the best and heaviest quality of tin...

"On the farm, some twenty miles from the headquarters...last year, 300 tons of hay were saved...The water at this farm is strong with gypsum, very unpleasant to a stranger, and in warm weather can discount a double dose of Epsom salts...

"...on bunch of Hereford bulls, about sixty in number...cost \$27,000, being the finest imported stock. The bulls alone on this ranch are valued at \$150,000 and number 2000 head. Tanks are made every few miles and at each tank a corral...Some fifteen tanks on this ranch, with the corrals, probably cost \$20,000. Everything of this kind is let out by contract...

"Young men...do the cooking...Many employees save their wages, and I was informed that this ranch company has \$26,000 cash on deposit belonging to the boys...They are permitted to buy horses and stock and keep them on the range, and encouraged to invest and keep their money."³

Goodnight lived at headquarters from 1879 until 1888; his wife, Mary Ann (Molly) Dyer Goodnight (1839-1926) and several ranch hands also lived at the headquarters. Only rarely did the ranch owners, John George Adair (?-1885) and his wife Cornelia Wadsworth Ritchie Adair (1837-1921), spend time at the JA Headquarters. Ranch hands assigned to the headquarters resided in the bunkhouse. The headquarters has served as the

³ J. Evetts Haley. *Charles Goodnight: Cowman and Plainsman*.

residence for the owners, manager, and hands from the ranch's founding to the present, and *its* function as a working ranch has remained consistent throughout its existence.⁴

The origins of the JA Ranch begin in the spring of 1876, when Goodnight first drove a herd into the Palo Duro Canyon. During the previous spring, Goodnight who was ranching in the Arkansas River country near Pueblo, Colorado, sent his partner Leigh R. Dyer (1849-1902) to herd cattle along Two Butte Creek near Las Animas, Colorado, while he gathered a herd along the lower Pecos River in Texas. As Goodnight drove his herd of 1,600 head back north to Colorado in the fall, he drifted onto the Llano Estacado and made winter camp along the Canadian River. As the weather gradually warmed in the spring, Goodnight moved his herd further into the Llano Estacado and summered the herd in the Palo Duro Canyon, which was an abundant mostly undisturbed country. Because the canyon offered excellent shelter for the herd, nutritious grass, and sufficient water, Goodnight decided to relocate from Colorado and establish a ranch in the Texas Panhandle. Throughout the summer and fall of 1876, Goodnight established his headquarters in a dugout near the south bank of the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River. By the middle of December, at least one room was complete on the cabin that was to replace the dugout as the ranch headquarters. As 1876 drew to an end, Goodnight had established his new ranch in the frontier of Northwest Texas and was determined to find the financial support to ensure the ranch's success.⁵

Early in 1877, Goodnight was back in Pueblo where he arranged to meet his wife and buy supplies for his Texas ranch. Goodnight also traveled to Denver to secure a loan from a brokerage firm that had financed him in the past. While at the brokerage house, Goodnight was introduced to John Adair, who intrigued the latter with his tales of the opportunities afforded by the Palo Duro Canyon. Adair, who was keenly interested in entering the cattle-raising business, agreed to travel to Texas with Goodnight to decide whether he would finance the ranch. From Pueblo, Goodnight assembled his pack train and a herd of 100 Durham bulls; Molly Goodnight, John and Coredlia Adair, and several hands embarked for the Palo Duro Canyon in the spring and arrived at the Old Home Ranch – the name Goodnight called his headquarters – in May. Goodnight showed the Adairs the canyon country, and during their two-week stay on the ranch they decided Goodnight was the proper choice of a business partner. Adair returned to Denver to draw up a contract with Goodnight, which was duly signed on June 18, 1877.⁶

The contract entered into stipulated a five-year partnership between John Adair and Charles Goodnight. Adair agreed to provide the capital to purchase land and cattle, and Goodnight would manage the ranch at a salary of \$2,500 per year. Goodnight suggested his partner's initials as a brand, this the choice of the JA brand. Adair agreed to permit his partner to choose land to purchase, although, he authorized Goodnight to acquire a limit of 25,000 acres and 15,000 head of cattle. At the conclusion of the contract, Adair would

⁴ Davilla Bright. "Foreigners and Foreign Capital in the Cattle Business of the United States." *The Cattleman*, March 1936, p. 37.

⁵ J. Evetts Haley. *Charles Goodnight: Cowman and Plainsman*, pp. 276-291

⁶ *Ibid*, pp.296-301.

receive two-thirds of the profits with the other third payable to Goodnight. However, Goodnight was obliged to repay his partner the initial investment plus 10% interest. The contract heavily favored Adair, but Goodnight was willing to enter into partnership under such terms because he was convinced he would earn enormous profits.⁷

Immediately upon the finalizing of the contract, Goodnight busied himself with the land and cattle acquisitions. Before the year ended, he had purchased in Adair's name 12,000 acres. Jot Gunter (1845-1907) of the surveying firm Gunter, Munson, and Summerfield of Sherman, Texas, contracted with Goodnight to survey the boundaries.⁸ Goodnight, however, did not simply purchase a continuous block of land; rather, he selected alternating blocks of land aptly described as a "crazy quilt pattern" that ensured he could later acquire the non-continuous tracts of land within the outer boundaries of the ranch. In this manner, Goodnight assured an early and highly possible degree of success for the Palo Duro Ranch – the name of the ranch as indicated in the contract – by purchasing land encompassing a wide expanse of the region.⁹ During the duration of the five-year contract, Goodnight bought 93,629 acres with Adair's authorization and money, an amount of land far greater than originally set in contract. Yet the land was quite productive for cattle raising, and Goodnight sold thousands of cattle at Kansas railheads; consequently, the profits from the ranch in 1882 proved quite lucrative. The acres of the Palo Duro Ranch were assessed at a value of \$150,000. The 27,870 head of cattle were valued at \$2,052. The Adair-Goodnight partnership yielded a net value of \$717,981, and after settling the initial capital investment and interest – an amount of \$205,272 – the partners were left with \$512,709 to divide. For his investment, Adair received \$341,806 and for his skillful management Goodnight received \$170,903. The early years of the ranch proved quite profitable and successful, and the partners decided to renew the contract.¹⁰

On May 3, 1882, just prior to the expiration of the original contract, Adair and Goodnight agreed to enter into a second five-year partnership. As in the first contract, Adair was to receive two-thirds of the profits at the conclusion of the term; Goodnight fared slightly better in the second contract as he received a raise to \$7,500 per year and the interest rate on the capital on loan from Adair was lowered to 8%. Goodnight continued to develop the Palo Duro Ranch and the JA brand was well known in Texas and at the railheads in the Midwest. Additional land was acquired shortly after the signing of the contract. Goodnight had separated the Palo Duro Ranch into two divisions according to the quality of the stock: the main herd was pastured on the JA Ranch, and the pure bred cattle were kept on the JJ Ranch. In 1882, Goodnight purchased the Quitaque (Lazy F) Ranch for Mrs. Adair, enlarging the overall range by 140,000 acres; the following year he bought

⁷ Harley True Burton. *A History of the JA Ranch*. Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones, 1928. Reprint edition, New York: Argonaut Press, 1966, pp. 26-27.

⁸ *The Handbook of Texas*. Jot Gunter, William Benjamin Munson, Sr. (1846-1930), and John S. Summerfield (1853-1918) were also partners in the T Anchor Ranch in Randall and Deaf Smith counties. Summerfield served as manager of the JA from 1910-1911.

⁹ Haley, pp. 302-304.

¹⁰ Burton, pp. 37-39.

170,000 acres in the Tule Canyon country. The addition of the Quitaque Ranch and the Tule Ranch extended the entire JA range into six counties: Armstrong, Donley, Hall, Briscoe, Swisher, and Randall. By the conclusion of the second Adair-Goodnight contract in 1887, the JA Ranch, encompassing 1,335,202 acres, was among the largest ranches in Texas.¹¹

Goodnight remained manager of the JA until 1888, although his contract had expired the previous year and had not been renewed. After John Adair's death in 1885, Goodnight and Mrs. Adair remained business partners. Although the prosperity of the ranch continued, Goodnight decided to sell his interest in the ranch to Mrs. Adair. In the terms of their agreement, Goodnight received the Quitaque Ranch.¹² Mrs. Adair considered selling the ranch, as she resided in both Ireland and New York, but she eventually decided to devote more time to the JA. To that end, Mrs. Adair had the main house built at the headquarters.¹³ She became increasingly involved with the operation of the ranch; she hired each subsequent manager after Goodnight and gradually spent more time at the ranch. Mrs. Adair hired six managers from 1888 to 1915: J.E. Farrington (1888-1890), Arthur Tinsdale (1890-1891), Richard Walsh (1892-1910), John Summerfield (1910-1911), James Wadsworth, Jr. (1911-1915), and Timothy Dwight Hobart (1915-1915).¹⁴ Mrs. Adair died on September 22, 1921, leaving a complex will to settle in Ireland, England, and the United States. Her grandson, Montgomery (Montie) Harrison Wadsworth Ritchie (1910-1999), arrived at the ranch in 1931, immediately after his graduation from Cambridge University. Hobart had continued to manage the JA in the intervening years since Mrs. Adair's death, but Montie Ritchie became concerned that the management of the ranch was not entirely efficient. Ritchie consulted his cousin and former manager of the JA, James Wadsworth, Jr., about the matter of a change in the trustees. Before legal action could be pressed, however, Hobart died, and Ritchie petitioned the Armstrong County Court for the appointment of permanent estate administrator. On September 14, 1935, Ritchie's request was granted and the first obstacle to returning the ranch to a sound financial condition was removed. Ritchie became administrator of a ranch that was enduring a similar fate as many other ranches. Ritchie, however, worked diligently to restore the ranch to profitability; the cattle market gradually improved and by the late 1940s the ranch once again experienced economic prosperity. Ritchie's responsibilities as estate trustee ended on October 11, 1948, when the final issues pertaining to Mrs. Adair's will were settled. Ritchie now owned the JA, and the ranch remains in his family as his daughter, Cornelia (Ninia) Wadsworth Ritchie

¹¹ Burton, pp. 38-59.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

¹³ The architectural design of the main house suggests the work of an architect, rather than an individual such as Goodnight, as the builder. Goodnight was able to build dugouts and cabins, and his primary talents centered on cattle and ranching, not architecture. No known reference exists that mentions the main house during Goodnight's tenure as manager of the JA; the original log cabin he and George Osborne built in 1878 had been modified to more properly accommodate the Adairs during their rare trips to the ranch, but the main house was built after Goodnight left the JA. The business records pertaining to the construction of the house may have been lost in a fire that partially destroyed the ranch's office in 1898.

¹⁴ L.E. Sheffy. *The Life and Time of Timothy Dwight Hobart, 1855-1935*. Canyon, Texas: Panhandle-Plains Historical Society, 1950, pp. 202.

Bivins owns and lives at the ranch headquarters.¹⁵

B. Historical Context:

The JA Ranch was established in the Texas Panhandle in 1876 when the entire region was one of the remaining unsettled areas of the American frontier. As recent as 1874-1875 when troops led by Colonel Nelson A. Miles and Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie defeated the Comanche bands under Quanah Parker in the Red River War, the Panhandle was considered undesirable for Anglo-European settlement. However, Goodnight and a handful of other cattlemen saw great potential in the land. By the 1870s, the cattle industry in Texas was greatly expanding, due in large part to the demand for beef, especially in the North. Goodnight drove JA cattle to Kansas railheads, fenced his ranges with barbed wire, improved the quality of his herds, and benefited from massive loans to operate the ranch. The significance of the JA's history is evident in the role it played during the age of English and Scottish investment in American ranches. Goodnight possessed the skill and knowledge to operate the vast ranch, but he lacked the necessary capital. John Adair provided the financial support from his own resources as well as from loans provided by the Texas Land and Mortgage Company, Ltd., of Dundee Scotland. The connection between English and Scottish capital and American enterprise forged one of the most important economic facets of the cattle industry in the late-nineteenth century. In June 1877, Adair agreed to establish the ranch with his own money, but in December 1883 Adair turned to the newly-organized Texas Land and Mortgage Company, Ltd., of which he was director, to provide a loan of £20,000 (approximately \$100,000) in order to expand and operate the Palo Duro Ranch. At the time, the loan was the largest amount of capital invested in an American ranch. Goodnight borrowed money from the Dundee firm as well; after he left the JA in 1888, Scottish capital was instrumental in his operation of the Quitaque Ranch.¹⁶

The JA Ranch may be considered one of the most successful operations to emerge from diligence and determination by individuals from Great Britain and the United States. The Adairs and Montie Ritchie established a sense of English culture and refinement, whereas the managers and hands worked the cattle and survived on the wits and skill inherent to American cowboys. Thus, the JA Ranch represents an important reminder of an era in the history of the American West and of Texas in particular that over a century ago the English and Scots were very heavily involved with ranching on the Great Plains. Although that business connection no longer exists, ranches such as the JA serve to recall a time that was. The JA Ranch represents that melding of British and American enterprise and continues to operate as a successful cattle ranch in the Panhandle of Texas.

¹⁵ B. Byron Price. "In the Shadow of Charlie Goodnight: The JA's Montie Ritchie." *The Ranch Record* Vol. 28, No. 3 (Summer 2000), pp. 7-9.

¹⁶ W.G. Kerr. *Scottish Capital on the American Credit Frontier*. Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1976, pp. 72-76.